

PM: We'll review free-port status of Langkawi island

N. SULT. 6 JAN 1991

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LANGKAWI, Sat. — The Government will review the free-port status of Langkawi as it has reached its economic take-off point. Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

He assured the people of Langkawi that a study would be carried out first, taking into consideration their views and other relevant factors, before the free-port status is withdrawn.

The study would include determining the suitable time to withdraw the status accorded to the island in 1987, he told reporters after launching the draft structure plan for Langkawi at the Sekolah Kebangsaan Kuah. The plan was displayed at the school.

The Prime Minister said the free-port status of Penang island was withdrawn for the same reason.

Speaking during the launching ceremony, Dr Mahathir said a free-port was to reduce the prices of goods to benefit tourists and the local people.

However, the Government regretted that many Langkawi traders had exploited the free-port status by selling goods at higher prices.

He stressed that the high cost of goods and exorbitant land prices on the island had greatly affected the Government's aim of wooing investors and visitors to Langkawi.

Dr Mahathir said the traders and landowners should be thankful for the free-port status and not exploit it by selling goods and land at exorbitant prices.

He warned that Langkawi's tourism industry would fail if the traders and landowners did not change their attitude.

He also told landowners and entrepreneurs to avoid building cheap chalets or hotels at places with high tourist potential as this was a great waste of limited choice land available on the island.

They should instead form joint-ventures with the private sector or invest the proceeds from selling the land.

Dr Mahathir also ad-

vised those involved in the tourism industry to provide good services to ensure tourists would return to the island.

On the structure plan, he said it was aimed at ensuring systematic development for Langkawi without sacrificing its natural beauty.

He urged investors to refer to the plan before embarking on their projects and approach the Langkawi Development

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Authority if in doubt.

The plan was prepared with the help of experts to ensure that the siting of tourism projects was not at the expense of the aesthetic aspects.

"The development of Langkawi should be with restrictions so that it does not destroy the island's heritage and natural surroundings," the Prime Minister said.

The draft will be displayed until Feb 5.

The public can submit

views or objections, which will be taken into consideration when drawing up the final report on the plan.

Work on the draft began in 1988 and was carried out by the Department of Town and Country Planning with the help of experts from France under the Malaysia-France technical cooperation.

Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Haji Osman Aroff said in his speech that the Kedah Government was paying more attention to promoting tourism on Langkawi.

He added that this did not mean the State Government would pay less attention to the development of agriculture in the State.

Datuk Seri Osman also said the Kedah Government would develop small and medium-sized industries in rural areas.

Earlier, the Prime Minister visited the Langkawi declaration monument at the Pelangi Beach Resort, which was erected to commemorate the Langkawi Declaration on the Environment on Oct 21, 1989.